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[Translated for this Journal.]

Mozart's "Don Giovanni."

BY A. OULIBICHEFF.

LIGHT AND SHADE.

At the very moment in which the composer had made his choice of a poem, a black-sealed letter was handed to him. It announced the death of his father,—a father who had been his teacher, his guide for twenty years, and his inseparable companion in his youthful triumphs. This event, natural and easily foreseen as it may have been, must have made a strong expression upon MOZART's loving soul and mind already familiar with the most mournful thoughts. But look at him a few months later, when he has come back to his

beloved Prague, which idolizes him, and where one feast, one concert follows close upon another, cheered by the enthusiasm which he has himself inspired, droller than ever in his talk, more wonderful than ever at his piano-forte. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of confidential friends surround him; the whole city is his confidential friend. He finds himself in the midst of a *troupe* of Italian singers, pleasant brothers and young amateurs from the first classes, who gather round him every day, as round the central point of business and enjoyment, each emulous to be the first to try and appreciate the new masterpiece, or to salute each newly finished number with a libation of champagne. A baptism entirely worthy of a "Don Juan," no one will deny. MOZART gratefully acknowledges the bumpers tendered at the hand of friendship, and undoubtedly some love affairs are going on in secret at the same time. Visits, pleasure parties, musical evenings, confidential sessions round the punch-bowl, and finally rehearsals, claim his entire day. As usual, only the night remains to him for writing. But then the scene is changed; all the laughing images of the day have vanished; all the jovial noise is silenced; MOZART is alone, and he sits behind two wax candles at his work-table, busy with his score. The October wind whistles in his ears to the accompaniment of dead leaves rustling to the ground. Shuddering he feels the moment of his daily change draw nigh. The planet, whose rotation leads his intellectual life, turns to him the night-side of its disk, on which the self-same image is continually impressed. He would fain flee from this unavoidable image; he writes down the jovial, erotic or grotesque inspirations, which the impressions of the day have awakened and already matured in his head. He writes, but suddenly it occurs to him that the hero of the piece, the living type of all the joys of earth, is a young man doomed to the grave, into which he must descend in the midst of the greatest activity of his corruptible and too seductive genius. But is not this genius that of the composer himself, which has now reached its culminating point? Must it not, now that it has by such immense proportions overstepped all known limits, react in a destructive manner on the composer, as well as upon that form? did not the same fate await them both? With these thoughts of the grave, which the sleepiness consequent upon too long waking had perhaps shaped into images, would the solitude of the composer people itself with phantoms.

Now calls to him the shade of his father through the voice of the Commendatore; now appears the beloved Muse, that binds him so firmly to this life, pale, with dishevelled hair, in loose mourning robes, under the features of Donna Anna, and whispers to him a farewell, such as only could be heard and repeated by himself (in the Sextet: *Lascia almen alla mia pena*, &c.) Thus the impressions of the day furnished the lights; those of the night the shadows.

We cannot but be struck beyond measure, when we see the wonderful relation of the thoughts of the poem not only with the deepest and most special individuality of MOZART, but also with the accidental causes which placed him, the composer, in circumstances and states of mind so fully analogous with the numerous and very contradictory requirements of his work. We turn to other, not less important circumstances.

FIRST INTERPRETERS AND PUBLIC.

The only public in Europe, which perfectly understood MOZART's music, was that of Prague; they alone regarded the man with the eyes of posterity. "Anything from MOZART will always be sure to please the Bohemians," said the Chapel-master STROHBACH to our hero. And MOZART answered: "Since the Bohemians understand me so well, I will write an opera on purpose for them." The orchestra, which played the overture to "Don Juan" at sight, and to the satisfaction of the master, was an orchestra such as it would be hard to find a second in the world. To complete the concurrence of all fortunate circumstances, fate offered MOZART a *troupe* of Italian singers, who understood music; a prima donna, TERESA SAPIORETI, who must have had a remarkably flexible voice, since the part of Anna, in which so many singers fail, was written for her. The Tenor was a Signor BAGLIONI, whose part of Ottavio shows him to have possessed fine means. On the other hand, we must infer, that in a score, containing not a single number, in which dramatic truth and expression are sacrificed to any subordinate end, the Prague company must have been as tractable as it was well made up. MOZART was the favorite of the public, a maestro, who brought in large receipts. His will therefore was law. The principal rôle was assigned to a young man of most elegant form and two and twenty years, who was as good an actor and a singer, as the part required. If we may trust the tradition and the portrait of Signor BASSI, in the costume

of Don Juan, the devil of seduction never had a worthier representative in the Opera. Happy, thrice happy are those friends of music, who have seen Don Juan by a BASSI, or by a GARCIA, a Spaniard, like the person represented. For myself who have not been so fortunate, I have ever kept the work in my imagination, to compensate me for having heard it in Russian, in Italian, in German theatres, abroad and in our two principal cities. I have seen at least one and twenty persons attempt or parody the part of Don Giovanni. All of them were unendurable, and each in his peculiar way. Not the least intelligence, not the slightest understanding of the part. One made Don Juan a street-brawler and a man only addicted to bad places; another, a lack-a-daisical, *blasé* dandy; a third, a disgusting sentimental coxcomb; while a fourth made a Jack-pudding of him, jumping about on the stage, and making *entrechats* in the allegro of *Là ci darem*. Again, another went behind the scenes, to rub his face with powder, so as to look awfully frightened, when the statue appeared; whereby the statue and the orchestra were obliged to wait some minutes and refresh themselves in the mean time with the jeers of the *parterre*. I could call all these gentlemen by name, but some of them are already dead; so peace to their ashes; the rest are old and have retired from the stage; so peace to their infirmity.

How is it possible to be so void of mind and understanding as to parody in this way a form, whose every motion is graceful, whose every attitude a study for the painter, every look seductive and like sparkling lightning; all which you find expressed plainly enough in the melody and in the rhythm? Giovanni must so bear himself, that the peace of a woman and the life of a man are never secure, from the moment he approaches; in such wise, that his demoniacal grandeur may maintain itself with some air of probability in the face of death and hell, who come to claim him. But if our actors do not comprehend this, let them at least comprehend, that Don Juan is a *cavaliere*, a nobleman of refined manners, who has nothing in common with a *bursch-icose* student, with the customers in Auerbach's cellar, notoriously regaled by Mephistopheles.

The reader must pardon this digression of bitter recollection on the part of a lover of music, who for twenty years has not had the good fortune to have seen a Don Juan, nor an Ottavio, nor an Anna, nor an Elvira, nor a Zerlina in the work which he is analyzing, and who is indebted solely to a reading of the score for an idea of all these characters. In one single instance I thought I recognized Leporello under the mask of ZAMBONI; but alas! this decaying Leporello impressed one as if born before his father and his singing had got to be scarcely audible.

One circumstance, however, consoles me, and must console a thousand music-lovers, who have not seen Don Juan better performed than I have; namely, the difficulty and perhaps impossibility of putting this opera upon the stage in an entirely satisfactory manner. This opera suffers in regard to scenic effect, through one main fault. There are no subordinate rôles. All the rôles and all the parts, with the exception of Masetto's, are of the highest importance; all require dramatic and musical talents of the first rank; and if we add to this a remarkably fine exterior for Don Juan, a thundering bass and a monumental stature for

the Commendatore,—peculiarities which those parts pre-emptorily require in the interests of material illusion and of moral probability,—then we ask, where shall we beat up three male singers and as many prima donnas, who would correspond even remotely to the idea of these six persons, each of which is the type of a class.

My readers may conceive of the extraordinary good fortune, which came to the aid of MOZART, when he created the opera of operas, the masterpiece of masterpieces. A subject, richer and more happily chosen than any possible lyric-dramatic stuff, a universal subject, like the genius who fructified it; a concurrence of circumstances, which exposed the musicians personally to the manifold and contrasted impressions, whose organ and interpreter he was called to be; an Italian *troupe* of the end of the eighteenth century, which was hardly enough to attack the most learned score in existence, and musically cultivated enough to come off with honor from what is even to-day a difficult study; singers, male and female, who seem to have been made for their parts; an incomparable orchestra; and, for the understanding of all that, an audience consisting of enthusiastic friends, who were thirty years in advance of all Europe in the power of appreciating a wonderful work! Never was a composer less limited by difficulties and local considerations, or more inspired and free to follow his own inspirations; never have so many happy circumstances conspired in favor of a work, and we may perhaps presume, there never will again.

* * * * *

FIRST SCENE—LEPORELLO—TRIO OF BASSES.

The curtain rustles up, and I invite my readers to an ideal representation of the "Don Juan," to a play with which criticism can find no fault. The actors and actresses, physically and morally, form a unity with the characters. With wonderful voices and a classic school they shall sing as one only hopes to hear in fancy. The orchestra, composed purely of *virtuosi*, who by an almost fabulous exception are as good *ripenists* as they are *symphonists*, shall never once miss a quarter note or an eighth pause. The decorations shall be truer and more beautiful than nature itself. Finally you shall find in me one of those serviceable and chatty neighbors, with whom perhaps it sometimes happens that they understand what they explain.

The play begins: we see before us the garden of a Spanish villa; on the right a trellis, the façade of a house; on the left in the background a pavilion surrounded with orange trees and flowers. Aurora just begins to show the smallest of her rosy fingers in the heavens; an individual keeps watch before the pavilion. The beginning of our opera is as modest as Virgil's *Arma virumque cano*. This person is no other than a servant, who wishes his absent master to all the devils, in return for the humors which he must put up with every day: *Notte e giorno faticar*, a melody, that tilts upon the intervals of the chord without any harmony. This insolent blockhead puts on an air of consequence; he too will be a gentleman and outbid the orchestra with this ludicrous declaration of independence. Excellent forsooth! A stupid, shameless lacquey, who in his own soliloquy does not deny himself to be a babbler and a boaster. Steps are heard approaching; the ass changes or lowers his voice and thinks now only

of the safety of his ears. Amid a heavy explosion of the orchestra appear Giovanni and Anna, rushing out from the pavilion. How wonderfully beautiful are they both! He holds up his mantle to conceal his face, but betrays his incognito by the nobility of his bearing and his movements; compelled to flee, he is agreeably held back by the small hand, which fancies itself strong enough to detain him; trembling, with dishevelled hair, half clad, she clings convulsively to the fearful being, whose breath could annihilate her. *Non sperar se non m'uccidi*, a splendid Terzet! What an expression and what strength in the melody; what an energetic pulsation in the rhythm! As this music chases the swift, hot blood through the hearer's veins, enters the father of Anna from the door at the left, not in his shirt and night cap, as he is so often represented, but wrapped in a Spanish mantle, his head uncovered, and in his hand a torch which lights up his venerable countenance, inflamed with noble indignation. Whether from pride or pity, it matters not, Don Juan, for the first time in his life, declines to fight. The Commander calls him a coward. I a coward! cries Don Juan. There are no words or pantomime, which can describe the musical exaltation in his answer. *Misero!* a prolonged exclamation of contempt and pity, which the thunder accompanies; *attendi*, two monotonous half notes, followed by a pause; then the mournful cadence in the minor upon *se vuoi morir*. These words have already stricken the hapless old man from the list of the living. Their swords cross; sparkling, upward sweeps of tone dart from the orchestra; both arms are outstretched, and shorten themselves in reversed order; steel strikes steel and sparks fly 'mid the ring of weapons. The battle alas! is too unequal and lasts but a moment. Giovanni's arm (the stroke of the violins) seeks the place of the heart, the thrusts fall thicker and ever closer to their marks. One, two, three, and the sword opens the deadly wound; the bass, which had taken three steps backward, falls upon the heart-rending hold, which its last movement has called forth. It were not possible for imitative music to go further; for it is undeniable that the analogy is much stronger in illusion here, than the real image of the transaction imitated, which you have before your eyes. Two actors, be they ever so experienced fencers, will never strike so naturally as it is done in the orchestra, with the intent to kill at any price. The key and tempo are changed; from D minor, through an imperceptible though very swift transition, we are brought into F minor; slowly divided Trioles succeed to the lightning-like Thirty-seconds, and the octave of the horns prolongs itself like a groaning echo, rising from the gaping breast of the old man. *Ah soccorso!* Here the scenic picture contends with the musical. The imposing figure of Giovanni shows itself in the score immovable, deeply buried in his mantle, thoughtful, with a contemptuous expression, and yet agitated. He bears the Cain's mark on his brow. At his feet lies the Commander stretched out, with one hand supporting himself upon the ground, and the other, full of blood, pressed upon his wound; with a voice, that fails him more and more, he invokes help against death, that already begins to disfigure his features and stiffen his limbs. As a foil to these, you see the expressive mask of Leporello, on which are depicted, in terrible excess,

astonishment, fear, sympathy and horror. These three melodies of contrasted basses loom up in a sublime group, on the ground-work of a very close accompaniment. The vocal song has ceased, and the last spark of life expires in the *ritornel*.

DONNA ANNA.

We have recommended the director and *capelmeister* of our *troupe* to pass immediately from this mournful Terzette to the second scene, which in this way will be appended to the introduction. Instead of letting Giovanni and Leporello exchange some insignificant talk here wholly out of place, they make the best of their escape in silence, and Donna Anna appears at once with Ottavio and the attendants. She finds only the dead body of her father. The alarm proceeding from the violas, and answered with a mournful cry by the suddenly awakened orchestra, rises at the moment when the torches illumine the place of mourning. *Padre! caro Padre!* Is it for us to depict this energy, which is even more exalted in her sorrow than in her anger, these fiery words choked by tears; this ever increasing heaviness of heart, which seems every moment as if it must break against the extremest limits of woe, and in the next moment awakens in us still more bitter moral pangs: *Quel sangue—Quella piaga—Quel volto—tinto e coperto del color di morte*; and then this heart, which suddenly ceases to beat and becomes as icy cold as that of the corpse: *E' non respira piu. . . . Fredda le membra?* Has not every one felt this shuddering charm himself? How then can he desire us to make many words about the Recitative of Donna Anna? Anna is the highest image of genius in the portrayal of tragic passions; she is the sublime tragedy of flesh and bones. To represent Anna perfectly, we need no less than our imaginary prima donna: a lady, who is the finest of her sex, the greatest tragic actress and the first singer in the world.

DON OTTAVIO.

The recitative, which we have just heard, would have been the despair and almost the failure of any composer but MOZART. The scene ends with a duet, and if the end crowns not the work, it spoils it. But MOZART did not spoil it. The poet had given him a splendid frame-work, and that was enough for him; the duet of duets follows quite naturally upon the recitative of recitatives. But before hearing this duet, let us speak a little of Anna's partner, who therein makes his *début*. Ottavio is the person, whom the critics seem least to have understood, because they have regarded his dramatic significance. True love, that feeling which lifts us so high in our own eyes and in the estimation of the lady whom we love, does not always suffice to raise us so high in the estimation of the world. In romance and even in the drama love creates its heroes only with the aid of the moral peculiarities, which it develops and sets in action. In reality, as in poetry, to be anything, one must bring something to pass: a fine action, a fine book, a fine score, a fine painting, or at least a fine dress; or one must possess something: a hundred thousand dollars income for example; or one must become something: a general, a minister, or at least an agricultural writer, who, in the want of an estate of his own to improve, writes articles in the journals. A man may have ever so much greatness of soul, yet so long as that

does not manifest itself outwardly, were it only in deeds of failure, or in words which the wind bears away, he is ignored, and thought a dullard, to whom they ascribe at most large claims and little means. One does not interest rational readers merely by reading. Ottavio does nothing, or can do nothing, which amounts to the same thing in the end; and yet for all that he is just what he was, the intended husband of his lady love. For a romance or drama Ottavio were a sorry figure! The most eloquent analysis of his feelings which might occupy him, would not compensate for his inactivity. He loves; therein alone consists his talent, his only virtue; and neither of these is it possible fully to appreciate in the libretto, because we lack all proof or testimony, beyond the words he utters, which prove nothing. The composer alone had it in his power to furnish us a measure of this talent and this virtue; he alone could translate this feeling by an action, that is, by an aria or a duet, and invest the same with all the probability and all the moral beauty, which lie latent in it. Thus out of the poor Ottavio, in spite of his passive rôle, his fruitless zeal and his continual entrance as a mere companion, if the musician pleased, there could be made the soundest tenor. The music revealed the mis-known man, and of the hero in his still life made a hero, who works upon all souls, that come in contact with his own, through the might of a love which is thus laid open in its inmost principle. Let us consider him now in action in the Duet.

Anna, whom the poet with true tact suffers to talk wild a moment after the fearful agitation of her mind in the recitative, thinks she sees the murderer of her father: *Fuggi, crudele, fuggi*. Allegro in D minor. Ottavio's divinely modulated strain in the minor tone of the Fifth and major tone of the Third, full of the most inexpressible tenderness, brings the warmly beloved back to herself. *Guardami un sol'istante*. She looks at him and recognizes him. *Ma il padre mio dov'è?* and the orchestra immediately takes up this proposition, which it comments upon and paints out in sombre colors; the fearful truth comes to light through the spiritual veil that covered it, *Hai sposo e padre in me*, replies Ottavio. What loving protection, what enthusiastic devotion, what a consoling charm, is breathed in that fall upon the Seventh, in which the obœ takes the initiative! how ready is the tender Ottavio, how happy would he deem himself, to offer up his life and his soul and more too, if it were possible, to dry the tears of Anna! "Swear," she says, in a few tones of commanding Recitative, "swear to revenge my father:" *Giuro*, I swear, and the whole religion of love flows forth in this solemn and earnest oath (Adagio.) The fire kindles up anew in Anna's heart, (*tempo primo*;) the figures in two notes of the violins, which the flute answers in the octave, gleam like lightnings on the stormy horizon of the passions; their voices unite; chords of indescribably magical effect, instrumental responses, borrowed from the most mournful tones of the soul, accompany their passionate words and alternate with them. When the words of the oath return, MOZART produces the same thought under an entirely new aspect. This time he does not retard the *tempo*, and the most striking modulations follow blow upon blow. As much solemnity as there lay in the promise at first, so much impetuous energy and inspiration are ex-

pressed in it now. The magnanimous soul of Anna lifts her lover for the time being to the level of her own greatness; for resolution and heroism in Ottavio are only the reflex of that. He has nothing personal but his love. If to so many beauties we add the further one at the end of the piece, namely, the expressive and imitative passage, *Vammi ondeggiando il cor*, the powerful syncopation of the following period, and the storm of the instruments, which roars on after the closing phrase, we have given a tolerably exact criterion of the most sublime of all duets that ever were composed or sung. The master himself has made no second, that even remotely resembles this.

[To be continued.]

National Music.

[There is a good deal of sense in the following remarks of the Philadelphia *Evening Bulletin*, elicited by Ole Bull's offer of a thousand dollar prize for a native American Opera.]

It is very natural that public curiosity should be excited to learn the result of this very novel mode of encouraging American genius, native and naturalized. We shall have all our musical young gentlemen, whose precocity may thus far only have shown itself in some very novel performances of "Old Folks at Home," the "Prima Donna Waltz," and "Old Dog Tray," turning their attention to American history and the art of musical composition. The annals of the new world will be explored from the time of Columbus down to that of Ole Bull, and perhaps some enterprising and adventurous genius may go a little back of the recorded history, and set to music the mythical age of our aborigines a thousand years ago. How very fit American subjects are for grand operas, any one can see at a glance. The career of Columbus alone would stock a fruitful brain with themes, and the stage has never presented so many striking incidents as the opera of "Columbus," written with fidelity, would offer. The first dreams of the great genius, his labors, travels and disappointments, would make a grand, turbulent first act, and we can imagine Columbus presenting his theory to Ferdinand and Isabella in a very expressive aria, to which their majesties respond in an assenting duet, after which Columbus rushes down to the foot-lights, and roars out a cavatina of exultation, while the thin-legged gentlemen and the oppositely endowed ladies of the court join in a boisterous chorus.

Then the voyage would come, and the orchestra would have a chance to represent, in the modern descriptive style, the whistle of the winds, the creaking of the rigging, and the roll of the waves. The singers would have to do the sea-sickness business, and there are spasmodic *prime donne*, tenors and basses on the stage already who very often go into convulsions that strikingly resemble the *mal de mer*. The rebellious disposition of the crew would furnish materials for fine choruses, which would finally be hushed to silence by the cry of "Land Ho!" from the look-out, who would always sing in C sharp. We shall not finish the story; but the hints we have given will suffice to arouse the efforts of our gentlemen of musical genius.

After Columbus, the history of Washington is the greatest that America affords, and we have no doubt there will be several operas of Washington among the works presented for competition for the prize. The Father of his Country will have his fame perfected by being set to music and being represented by some big Italian basso, who shall rant over the stage, give his orders in the key of G major, lead on his armies to an accompaniment in the Verdi style, sing a touching *romanza* whenever he separates from Mrs. Washington, and perhaps occasionally throw his arm around some companion-in-arms, and, after the fashion of the *Puritani* duet, roar out a new *Suoni la tromba!* Those composers or libretto-writers who think Washington a used-up subject, could take Benja-

min Franklin, or William Penn, or Daniel Boone, or Aaron Burr, or the Whiskey Insurrection, or the Buckshot War, or the Erie troubles, or the history of Joe Smith, or Brigham Young, or Pierre Soulé, or Franklin Pierce! Why, our history is crowded with materials quite as fit for operas as some that throw fashionable audiences into ecstasies of delight.

But, seriously, our good fellow citizen, Ole Bull, has taken a wrong plan to promote Art by limiting the range of genius to American subjects. Are those novels of Cooper and those tales of Irving, whose scene lies in foreign countries, less American than the others? Is Longfellow not an American poet because most of his subjects are foreign ones? Is Power not an American artist because his *chef d'œuvre* is a Greek and not an American Slave? No, Mr. Bull: it will take higher inspiration than your thousand dollars to develop genius and promote Art as you define them. The idea of national genius, as entertained by many, is a fallacy; for genius is an attribute shared by the whole race, though in different degrees; and neither climate, geographical lines nor naturalization papers can so modify it as to give it a distinct character in each land, or in each nation of the earth. Art, which is the material result of genius, is equally catholic in its character. It is rude or refined, according to the moral, religious and social habits of different nations; but every attempt to parcel it off into different packages and label it "American art," or "English art," or "German art," has been more or less a failure. It is true that different nations make different exertions in special branches of the fine arts, and Greek sculpture, Italian music, French decoration, and Dutch painting have certain distinct features. But they are all efforts in one direction; all aim at the beautiful—the fulfilment of certain ideas of perfection which are common to the whole race; for the proof of which community of property we refer to the universal assent of all nations when any one of the few perfect pieces of Art that "enchant the world" has been produced. The clap-trap cry of American Art does more to embarrass the exertions of American artists than any of the social or commercial or political difficulties they have to contend with. It alarms them into making unnatural and desperate exertion to produce novel effects. Their work must be unique—not merely as all perfect works are unique—but it must be 'American,' and when they try to make their statues American, they necessarily violate the standards of beauty, and produce men and women of rather ungraceful outline. When they try to make their music American, what can they do, unless they reject the models of the old world and fall back upon Yankee Doodle, the Star Spangled Banner, or the negro melodies? We must be content, till we get older, richer and more composed, to follow in the course that artists have laid down in nations where Art has been studiously pursued for ages. We dare not reject the fruits of their study and practice, and it is the supremest folly to talk about setting up a distinct school of American Painting, or American Sculpture, or American Music, and to pretend to the name of a patron of American genius, by enclosing it in geographical lines and giving it work by the job at the rate of a thousand dollars for each successful effort.

For Dwight's Journal of Music.

American Opera.

The brief annals of our musical growth present us with many abortive attempts to establish a permanent Opera.

In the metropolis, where we find the great concentration of wealth, of musical talent drawn from abroad, and a considerable portion of that motley patronage which seems to be the indispensable sustenance of all dramatic representation, Euterpe has, as yet, found no fixed abode.

Among the older nations of civilized Europe, the soul that animated the Art Temple was found

to pervade the ranks of the people before the conception of the building; with us, however, the genius of a classic architecture is always at hand to impart beauty to the outward and material design, before the intellectual element, which is to fill and animate the interior, is thought of.

The fact that not an operatic institution could prove stable among us, notwithstanding twenty-five years of effort to rear it, shows a strong contrast between our own nationality in heart, temperament and imaginative enjoyment, and that of the Italian people.

Modern music, which, as a science, dates its birth at the end of the sixteenth century and in Holland, was transplanted into Italy in the early part of the seventeenth century, where it was adapted to the requirements and illustration of of scenic representation.

In the earlier and darker periods, the church ceremonies were the only modes by which outward, or pictorial and dramatic action, was elevated and inspired by the harmonies of sound; and such was the vocation of the musical art for a long period. It lay buried among the deeper emotions of the soul and was called forth on all sacred occasions. As a language of passion it may have been used by the Troubadours; it was also adapted, in its unsophisticated styles, to all the purposes of the mediæval minstrelsy. But in none of these forms did it ever rise to the level of a science, or was it studied for the furtherance of æsthetic purposes.

In Italy, where the gift of song was identified with the character of the whole people, the necessity for the union of a pictorial and musical representation was soon felt. Florence took the lead in this, and was followed, in 1601, by Bologna, and the passion for Opera prevailed throughout the nation to such a degree, that it spread from city to city, until Venice, with her St. Cassino, in 1637, attained the highest celebrity for melodrama. The people there became so imbued with this species of music, that during the remaining part of the century Venice enumerated no less than fifteen opera houses. To feast the eye and entrance the soul, appeared to be the absorbing aim of a pleasure-loving population; and where the genius of painting offered such facilities for scenic decoration, as it did among the Italian people, combined with that natural growth of Italy, a romantic and impassioned musical composition, we may readily conceive the turn which all musical entertainment must have taken, and how universally popular Opera must have become. At this early period Germany adopted the music of Italy, and almost every court sustained its Opera and orchestra of Italian performers, to the utter neglect and depreciation of its own native artists.

By this overweening partiality for Italian music and its imitation, all nationality was suppressed, and immense sums were lavished upon foreign talent, in the departments of music, poetry, and the musical drama. This state of things lasted until 1678, more than half a century, when Hamburg erected the first German Opera House, in which the introductory performance was a piece entitled "Adam and Eve."

There is some analogy between our own musical history and that of Germany, in some of these particulars, which would seem to indicate that we may be passing through similar phases of a musico-mental development.

We think it is some twenty-five years since Rossini's *Tancredi* was performed in this country, in original Italian, since which time almost all operatic music has been given in that language, if we except some French exhibitions of the New Orleans troupe, and occasional English pieces. This, at the same time, corroborates the curious fact, that the glow of Italian song has insinuated itself into all climes, particularly where a national school has not yet grown up, and we are but one of the many nations who have, in their early career, adapted their wants to the Italian style.

In Italy, where the modern Opera was brought to its present perfection, the desire for outward show and pictorial representation was the ruling passion of the people. Poetry and painting and all the accessories of the drama thus became mutually illustrative, and in a land where the climate itself imparts such buoyancy to the imagination, we cannot wonder that the product of that imagination is found to be the brilliant and showy emanation of musical romance.

The whole material picture of that country and all its sensual enjoyments, induced by the southern clime which chastens the whole landscape of nature into poetry, is a mental absorption to the Italian, and utters itself aloud in the productions of poetry, song, painting and sculpture. The gayety of life, common to kindred European nations, made the Opera a congenial form of relaxation, and hence we find it succeeded to such a degree in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Germany and France.

In applying these views to our own position and musical predisposition, it is natural to inquire where the inception should take place, and on what it should be founded. We have seen some slight demonstration of a national music in our 'Ethiopian Minstrelsy' and local airs, but these are far removed, in point of æsthetic and scientific character, from operatic composition. The first great adjunct to this form of modulated melody, is scenic representation, a mode of appealing to the senses which is always alluring, irresistible and effective. In no country in the world is this mode of appeal more successful than in our own. Scarcely a work of poetry or fiction is launched upon its literary voyage, without first being well provided with all possible artistic embellishments. It thus becomes a rather derogatory fact, that the showman is in the van, and the modest figure of a sedate and meditative Philosophy, with all her offerings of cultivated and beautiful thoughts, is seen in the rear.

This very tendency, however, should be deemed propitious to the growth of Opera, since two main elements constituted the groundwork of its outward and attractive form: painting and romantic poetry.

We need but study the affinity between music and those two departments of inventive art, to form a proper judgment of their combined beauty, the strict necessity of their fraternity, and the indissoluble bonds by which they form a species of representation, which, for the last two and a half centuries led all the votaries of pleasure within their entrancement.

How scenic exhibition and melody can mutually suggest each other, is made apparent in the fine effects produced by the performance of favorite airs in the quiet of night, or in the solitude of picturesque nature. The music itself enhances the

operation of nature upon the mind, while, at the same time, the language of tone speaks with redoubled emotion.

The singular fascinations of tone upon our organization seem to unlock an unknown entrance to the natural world, while the latter itself, operating upon the senses, makes us more alive to the sounds of our own creation. It is with the design of bringing the mind into this situation, that scenic representation is resorted to, and although the effect falls far short of what Nature herself produces, it is yet more powerful than poetry and music conjoined, where no tangible object strikes the imagination. Next to the force imparted by scenic decoration, we have to look to a romantic poesy for the ready material for an attractive opera. It was natural that the "Bride of Lammermoor" and "Lady of the Lake" should spring up in opera by the pure, inherent strength that lay in their picturesque delineations, both of nature and personage, and the deep vein of tragic passion which fits them for the finest harmonies of tone.

When Scott called these creations of romance and poetic song into being, he offered facilities to the composer, not to be exceeded in any other ground of fiction. Among the frequent propositions made to engraft opera upon our nationality, the most usual is that of Anglicizing the melodrama, and thus making it accessible to the mass, by enlisting their interest in the romance, where the sole force of cultivated music could not do it. The suggestion contains some plausibility, but it must remain one of the weaker points of apology for our want of appreciation of the beauties of Opera in America.

In all such instances, where language is an impediment to musical expression, the ease and flow of delivery, or those rounded forms for which the dialects of southern Europe are so well adapted, our English tongue would but serve to mar a good performance.

It would seem as if all melo-dramatic romance needed the language that gives the most eloquent utterance to poetic sentiment, wrought up emotion and tragic passion. In all these essentials, it is true, our own language is strong, controlling every subject by the force of its peculiar emphasis, the telling boldness of its intonation and the adaptation of its cadences to express all the shades of passion. Yet all this applies to declamation, rather than to music; for the English language, being used by nations in whom the exuberance of naive feeling, or the outward demonstration of the social affections, is not particularly prominent, has never been so moulded into those insinuating forms which captivate the ear, in the musical languages of continental Europe.

The part which opera performs, independent of music, which is its first attraction, being that which is visible to the senses in the poetic display of nature, architecture and costume, these in themselves, where the story is understood, are sufficient to illustrate the music and enchain the attention.

We have no doubt that American subjects, embodying the scanty poesy and romance that our limited ground would admit of, could be made attractive, by adapting the lighter forms of musical composition to the work; but whether they would promote the cause of the art would depend on their forming the groundwork for something better at some future period. National

subjects themselves should lay no particular claim to our interest, in this connexion, since musical emotion is universal and represents humanity wheresoever it is found. This universal sentiment that speaks through the instrumentality of tone and rhythm should, therefore, be listened to for the sake of itself and not the language which forms its exterior.

As regards the forms, combinations and styles of musical expression, these should be regarded as common property and at the disposal of all who choose to apply their own inventive powers to the illustration of the lyric muse. It is as justifiable for the composer to apply the tone sentiment of Mozart or Rossini to the poetry he may choose to select as the outward material of his opera, as it would be to appropriate the octosyllabic lines of Scott to some metrical romance of American tradition; since rhythm, of whatever measure, is common ground, proceeding from the same universal impulse; the interpreter of feeling among every class and every nation alike.

On the same principle the metrical rhythm can be the privilege of all, and it is only left for the genius of musical invention to pile harmony upon harmony, in bringing new works before the world. It appears to us that the greater want of success, in all past operatic attempts, has arisen more from a general want of comprehension of the music than the written text. To those in whom an innate love of music reigns and who listen with rapture to the countless combinations of harmony which rise to the surface of that vast sea of melody, which a single opera presents, the text and even the plot are a matter of perfect indifference.

Metrical romance, when illustrated by the lyrical drama, and made familiar to the popular heart by constant repetition, will conduce largely to the recreative charms of life, particularly where whole scenes and favorite passages are learned by rote and chime in with all the idle hours of existence.

Yet independent of all narration, music has its own peculiar world of thoughts, and into this we would fain see our people initiated. In this sphere the truly devoted virtuoso will always be found to move, ever constructing the fabric of thought on the groundwork of harmonic themes. And thus it will be with the educated and inquiring mind of the general mass, among whom there is a constantly improving æsthetic tendency.

In a moral point of view, and even on the score of higher cultivation, a large class of dilettanti would prefer chamber concerts, and the more chaste atmosphere that surrounds them, to the sensual, and in some instances, demoralizing associations of an opera house. But would not the dramatic attraction of musical performances on the stage impart a taste for true music, where none previously existed? Would they not tempt many to listen, and, gradually, to enter spiritually into harmonious thoughts, which a mere instrumental interpretation they could not relish or comprehend? For herein lies one of the highest attributes of the lyrical drama, that it gives a visible representation to the very passions, loves and hates it depicts, and is the ætherial essence of melody made tangible.

(Conclusion next week.)

A GERMAN SHARP AND AN ENGLISH FLAT.
The most severe and cutting hit we have heard

for some time, was made at one of our theatres a few days since during an operatic rehearsal, by the "bass viol." The rehearsal had been delayed some time by the non-appearance of the *primo-tenore*, who is proverbial in his singing for frequently being out of time and tune. Finally he appeared, and the orchestra was called. The double bass was absent, which was considered an act of base desertion on his part, and drew forth a storm of indignation from the *tenore*. At length the absent musician appeared, with the froth of lager beer adhering to his moustache. "What the deuce do you mean, sir," said the singer, "keeping everybody waiting for two hours? You ought to be discharged." "You dink so, eh?" retorted double-bass. "Teufels, I was wait every day, und every poddy else for two hour, und I only have yust run out for five minutes to get a little lager bier, und you insult before every poddy.—But I shall haf my revenge to-night; whenever you sings, I shall play in tune."—N. Y. Picayune.

Dwight's Journal of Music.

BOSTON, FEB. 3, 1855.

The Opera.

DON PASQUALE.

The tragical excitements of "Norma" and "La Favorita" were suffered to cool down on Friday evening (the sixth of the regular nights) by the representation of this graceful little genteel musical comedy of Donizetti. It has no remarkable music in it, but much that is sparkling and pretty, though not to be thought of in comparison with *Il Barbiere*. The action is all confined to the four principal characters, two of whom are dressed as they might walk in Washington street, and affords no room for grand musical ensembles or scenic displays. Once only is the even flow of the parlor comedy interrupted and relieved, when the stage is flooded by a chattering chorus of domestics.

We have before had the part of the cunning and coquettish young widow, Norina, done to perfection almost by Mme. SONTAG. And it was wonderful that one, whose chief power lies in so different and grand a line of characters, as GRISI, could wear this part so easily and scarcely suffer in comparison. It was a most natural, playful, graceful, spirited impersonation, and all its shifting moods were acted to the life. Whether smiling over her inveigling charms in solitude, or betraying love's sincere alarms; whether deceiving the gouty and absurd old Don as the bashful novice, as the coaxing coquette, or as the terrible shrew; in each and every real or assumed part, the Grisi was entirely transformed into the Norina of the play. Her music was charmingly and easily delivered, and she looked and dressed the part delightfully.

MARIO, for the first time here, bore himself indifferently, treating the requirements of the lover's part as lightly as possible, and only exerting himself to show some real touch of his rare voice and style in the everlasting serenade: *Com' è gentil*, and in the turtle-dove duet with Grisi; *Tornami a dir*. It was the least of Mario's performances.

SUSINI made a very passable Don Pasquale, though by no means so good as we have had.—BADIALI, as Doctor Malatesta, was at home, sure and effective at all points, and, as is his artist-like wont, appeared to merge himself in a view to the success of the play. The quartet, in which

the infatuated old fool as a Don wakes out of the stupor of amazement, is about the most effective piece in the opera, and elicited an encore.

Saturday afternoon was devoted to an extra performance of *NORMA*.

DON GIOVANNI.

It is our fate, with regard to all chances of hearing and appreciating MOZART's masterpiece in this country, that it never turns to us more than one or two at a time of the many sides which make its perfect whole. We never get all its characters fitly represented, all its conditions realized, in any one performance. If the Zerlina is good, the Donna Anna is bad; if the orchestra suggests the musical sense of the drama, the singers and actors belie it on the stage; or *vice versa*. It differs from the modern *effect* operas, as a play of Shakespeare differs from the plays best suited to the powers of our theatrical stock companies; or as any great work of genius from a clever, readily appreciable work of talent. "Don Giovanni" contains not a single unimportant part or character; it needs an artist, an actor and singer of genius, for the right rendering of at least half a dozen of its principal rôles,—indeed for every thing above mere chorus. The difficulties and almost impossibilities of a really adequate representation of it on the stage, are quite analogous to those of representing Shakespeare. In either case it is by many hearings, each in turn revealing to us some point or character in the true light; and still more is it by private reading and study of the work, helped out and stimulated occasionally by these imperfect attempts at representation, that we get to understand and feel the work in its completeness, so that thenceforward no least part of it can ever appear insignificant or fail to interest us.

The difficulty is enhanced in the case of "Don Giovanni," by a plot, by a libretto, which taken literally, apart from the music, in which alone the soul and true interpretation, MOZART's, and not DA PONTE's, interpretation of it, reside, is almost certain to mislead,—especially when acted out upon the stage, as we commonly see it, with the broadest literalness, by singers who do not think first of all to enter into the spirit of MOZART's music. No one will ever get a right conception of this truly Shakespearian opera, who does not listen principally to the music, and familiarize himself with that; who does not continually take refuge in the orchestra from things that seem absurd or stupid on the stage.

If such intrinsic difficulties are in the way of representing MOZART's opera even in his own Germany, even in the best appointed theatres, what can we expect of travelling Italian troupes not made up primarily with any reference to the production of such works as this, but solely to the production of the *Favoritas*, *Normas*, *Lucrezia Borgias*, *Ernans*, &c., in which the plot is simple and exciting, and the dramatic interest all centres in one or two leading characters, "stars," who seldom leave the foreground, while whatsoever is secondary is almost insignificant and may be filled out by the cheapest supernumeraries;—operas in which the prima donna counts for more than the composer, and the music is mainly thought of as it illustrates her and renovates her triumphs.

The performance of "Don Giovanni," therefore, by the GRISI and MARIO troupe, on Monday eve-

ning, is to be taken as something exceptional in their general programme, something out of their peculiar line. And yet it was an exception in which we must thankfully recognize a graceful deference to a Boston musical taste, while we are and should be thankful at any time to hear this opera given with as many good elements as this troupe could furnish. Yet we have once or twice enjoyed the opera as a whole somewhat better. We have had a better orchestral treatment, and perhaps a better average of principal parts.—Could we have had some of the excellent parts of former representations (say the almost perfect Zerlina of Mme. BOSIO, or the very charming one of Mme. SONTAG) with the new excellencies of this, we should have had a pretty fair presentment of "Don Giovanni."

As it was, it was a privilege which one once smitten with the charm of Mozart's music, would not for many accompanying imperfections have forgone, simply to witness for the first time in our theatres a worthy impersonation of the greatest character in the piece, the character of Donna Anna. GRISI, for the first time, has filled out to us Mozart's conception of the most beautiful and lofty of all his female characters. Grisi was the first who could look and act the part, as indicated in the noble, impassioned, spiritual music which the composer has assigned to it. She could bring out the wonderful pathos of that recitative over her dead father, and the fire and sublime energy of the oath and duet of revenge. She could sustain the arduous melody of that trio of maskers at its heavenly height, suffering not a drop of its eloquent beauty to be lost, so that with the support of MARIO, in spite of the crude and uncertain scourgings of the other soprano, it ravished the audience, and had to be repeated.

Above all, in that great recitative and aria (*Ottavio, son morto: and Or sai chi l'onore*), where she recognizes her father's murderer and relates the outrage to her lover—perhaps the grandest piece of lyric monologue that exists—GRISI found sphere for her loftiest and most impassioned action and vocal declamation, fully equal to her famous *Ah, non tremare* scene in "Norma," while the music here is unspeakably greater. That scene alone, although it was too good to "bring the house down," was worth an evening's entertainment to an appreciating listener, and as worthy of the name of "high Art" as anything we ever witnessed on the stage. Study its music over, and then mark it well the next time you can hear it so performed!

We had truly hoped that, having now for once a Donna Anna, she would have given the great song *Non mi dir*, always heretofore omitted on the stage, and only sung in public once or twice here by JENNY LIND, and then in a style and spirit worthy of its lofty, lovely melody. But in this we were disappointed; the last spiritual strains of Donna Anna's voice had floated away in the mysterious chords of the swift and intricate Sextet.—But what do certain critics mean by talking of Donna Anna as a part of secondary consequence, and advising that Grisi would do better to take the part of pretty little affectionate, coquettish Zerlina! That too is a beautiful and all-important part: but because Bosio and Sontag took it, does it follow that Grisi should, or that it is the first part? Donna Anna subordinate! Why, she is the heroine, and soul and central inspiration of the piece, the type of

loveliness and womanhood, and the embodied heavenly Nemesis that chants all through this complex tale of wrong and that forefeels the coming Destiny. Donna Anna is Mozart's choicest creation; to her has he assigned the greatest music. Is it necessary that the greatest character should be in the foreground all the time? The answer to this question reveals another reason why a great musical life-poem, constituted like "Don Giovanni," absorbs the attention of the many, at first, less than the intense modern Italian plots. It is because of its very truth to nature and to life, because it is so vital with genius in every detail and every fibre; so that none of the characters that come and go and intermingle in the picture claim exclusive prominence for more than a short time; yet they make their mark none the less; so it is in life, in actual history; so it is in the true life poems "that hold the mirror up to nature;" and only in those artificial, forced products, the *effect* dramas, is it not so.

It was a real gain therefore in this programme to get for the first time a Donna Anna (although we owe to pleasant memories of TRUFFI.) It was one of Grisi's famous parts, and in no part has she shown a finer and higher talent. It also gave us an Ottavio, a part heretofore always caricatured. By MARIO's delicious tenor, beauties of the first scene, of the quartet, the trio, the ball scene and the sextet, always faint or marred before, stood out fair and appreciable. But it was in the most perfect of tenor songs, in *Il mio tesoro*, that he gave us by far the finest exhibition of himself, revealing the full beauty, depth and tenderness of Mozart's love-fraught melody. In the strong and declamatory portions he was as perfect as in the sweet and simple melody, the exquisite roulades and cadences; and the impression of that sustained high note, where the voice hangs poised, as it were, in ecstatic reverie, while the melody moves on in the instruments, cannot soon fade away. If one's curiosity be mainly to hear Mario, we cannot think of a better opera than this. But Mozart has given another exquisite aria to Ottavio: *Dalla sua pace*;—why could he not also sing that?

As for the two characters that are kept pretty constantly upon the stage, Don Juan and Leporello, they were at least fairly done. SIG. BADALI is much the best Don Juan we have ever had here, and, so far as singing and musical *parlando* go, fails not to afford that artistic satisfaction which he always has to give. But in age and person he is not after Mozart's, or Oulibicheff's, ideal of the part,—not another BASSI; and though his impersonation of it was refinement itself compared with some we have had, (in which the Don and his servant seemed to have exchanged parts through the whole piece, as well as in the serenade scene,) it still smacked too much of the literal libretto, and too little of Mozart's conception as indicated in his music. SIG. SUSINI's Leporello had many good points, but was rather heavy; it had too much of the blockhead and too little of the subtle knave. Moreover his *basso* is not telling enough in the lower notes, so that the trio of basses, in the first scene, where the Commendatore dies,—one of the most marvellous pieces in the entire music, was feeble and confused;—doubly so through the vocal insufficiency and serio-comic dying of the respectable commander. This gave the opera a bad start at the outset, and probably

weakened the impression throughout. As the speaking statue, too, Sig. CANDI lacked ponderous marble tones, and trembled in his shoes as his hand grasped a culprit stronger than himself. Masetto is an important part, essential to a clear perception of much of the fine concerted music, especially in the hurried series of delicious little scenes before the first first finale. But our Masetto was a puppet with a voice scarce audible, and that apparently a tenor instead of a baritone.

Returning to the *prime donne*, of whom the play requires three of the highest excellence, we have to regret the worse than want of a fit Elvira. Signorina DONOVANNI had neither the voice, skill, action, conception, or studied acquirement of her part,—a part in itself next in dignity to Donna Anna, high, impassioned, devoted, to which much of the most difficult and soaring music is assigned. This marred the trio and the exquisite quartet: *non ti fidar*, that has not its equal in all opera. Then she listened to Leporello's catalogue song like an automaton, as if the womanly and wronged Elvira could have power to listen! The Zerlina of Mme. LORINI (known as our Boston singer, Miss VIRGINIA WHITING) was quite well sung, eliciting encores in the duet, *La ci darem* (which by the way was taken very slow,) and in the *Batti, batti*; but the naive grace and charm of the character, after one has seen Bosio, were not there.

Chorus and orchestra would hardly bear critical report, and it was well understood that the whole thing was got up hastily. Yet the main features of the music were there, and if one listened to the orchestra he was surely borne away upon the luscious tide of Mozart's musical invention.

Many scenes were inadequately, and some altogether wrongly, treated. The great first finale, the ball room scene, was seldom made so feeble. You saw nothing but a party of peasants on the stage; no ladies and gentlemen, corresponding to the stately minuet in the music. The three distinct dance times that play on at once in the orchestra, were unexplained by anything upon the stage; where there should have been halls opening into hall, and three *real* bands, that in the foreground playing the minuet for the noble company to dance by, while the boors in the background danced their country-dances and waltzes to their own droning musicians. But M. Oulibicheff will set all that right, when we come to it in our translations.—Again, the sextet scene was unintelligible; the *bujo loco*, dark, cavernous enclosure, was made a public street, and Leporello instead of groping his way out, seemed to be groping his way into the doors of people's houses. But on the other hand we must give credit to the (in our theatres) unparalleled beauty and effectiveness of the scene of the statue upon horseback. It was really artistic.

"DON GIOVANNI" was announced for repetition last night, and we doubt not, we shall have many improvements to report.

OULIBICHEFF ON "DON GIOVANNI."—We have already within the past three years said and published a good deal about this opera. We have given our own somewhat studied attempt at an analysis of it, and we have translated from Hoffmann, Mozart's Russian biographer, above-named, and others, thoughts which helped to place its beauty and significance in the right light. But we find, whenever it is performed here, such misunderstanding and misappreciation of the work, both on the part of public and performers, that we have been anxious to set some matters right about it, by giving our readers

a few extracts from a very able, thorough and extended analysis of "Don Juan" by Oulibicheff. Its length, however, seemed to make it unmanageable; and we have finally concluded to take time for it, and give pretty much the whole of it. On the first page therefore, we have commenced; not at the beginning, for we could safely omit much of the long metaphysical introduction, and we had already published the imaginary conversation between Mozart and Da Ponte about the libretto, (vol. i., page 33.) We also omit the description of the overture, which has already appeared in vol. ii., p. 9. We take the liberty also to break it up by special headings. If any one will follow it through, referring at the same time, if possible, to the music itself, we will warrant him against indifference to "Don Giovanni," the next time it shall come round for performance.

Miss HENSLEY's *debut* at La Scala, Milan, is understood to have been eminently successful, in spite of most discouraging circumstances. We had confidently looked for letters by this steamer, which would enable us to give a full and authentic account of it. But we must wait for the arrival of the Union.

CONCERTS.—Notices of the Mendelssohn Quintette Club, and the Orchestral Union, must wait till next week. An account of the opening of the new organ at Somerset St. Baptist Church is also deferred.

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